

BULLETIN

OF THE

BRITISH ORNITHOLOGISTS' CLUB

Volume 81

Number 2

Published: 1st February, 1961

- 2 FEB 1961
PURCHASED



The five hundred and eighty-seventh meeting of the Club was held at the Rembrandt Hotel, S.W.7, on 17th January, 1961.

Chairman: CAPTAIN C. R. S. PITMAN

Members present, 40; Guests, 26; Total, 66.

The Chairman welcomed Vice-Admiral Nigel Henderson, the new President of the Royal Naval Bird Watching Association, among the guests.

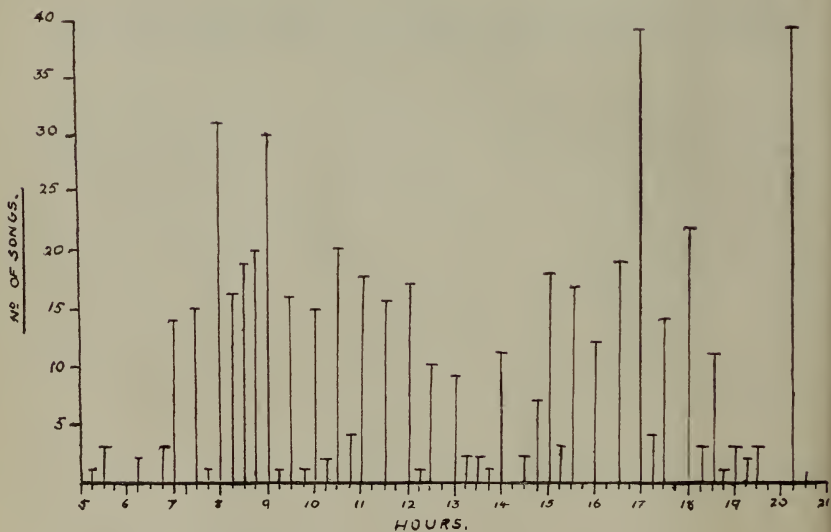
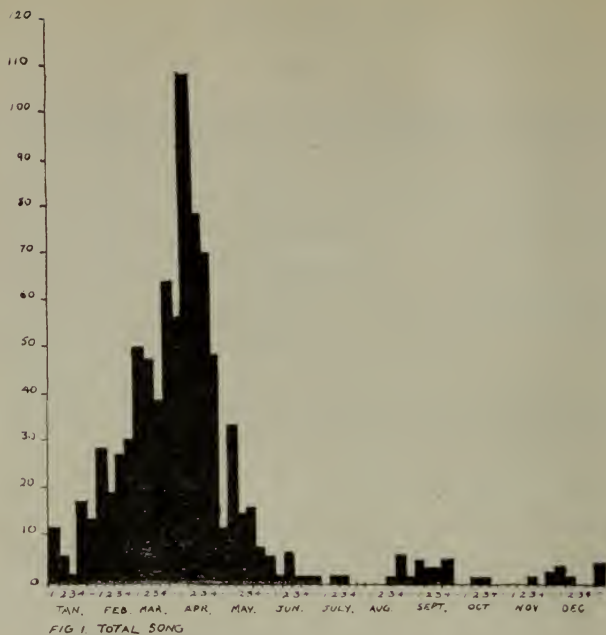
Two films were shown; the edited edition with sound track of Bayar Read's *The Birds of East and Central Africa*, loaned from the Fauna Preservation Society and *The Loch Ness Monster*, a short sequence filmed and enthusiastically explained by Mr. T. N. Dinsdale.

Song variation in the Great Tit, *Parus major newtoni*

by R. G. FINNIS

Received 24th October, 1960

Song variation in the Great Tit is so well known that a list of descriptions including such terms as "saw-sharpening", or just plain "sawing"—often rendered "TEACHER", "bell-ringing" and "the anvil note" are used at times. Koch, 1955, stated that he had heard sixty-eight different songs although at that time he had recorded about twenty only, while Nicholson (1936) wrote . . . "for no other British bird uses such a wide variety of different notes." *The Handbook*, p. 247 gives "Chief form of 'song' is so-called 'saw-sharpening', a strongly metallic "teechu-teechu-teechu-teechu . . .", "teechuwee-teechuwee . . .", etc. Diversity of vocabulary is most conspicuous in numerous other derivative or distinct song-phrases, of which same bird may use several in succession. Most are repetition of one, usually disyllabic or trisyllabic component of generally more or less loud, sometimes bell-like, notes, but more complex components of several syllables also occur . . ." Also p. 247 it is stated "Great Tit, which has most varied repertoire of all, (common tits) is so prolific in variations and combinations, and these seem so little stereotyped, as to defy concise treatment, and really adequate analysis has yet to be made . . ."



With these facts in mind I have attempted an examination of song types during the years 1954-59 inclusive, in North Kent, mainly around Gravesend, using a diagrammatic form of song recording where possible in order to discover the frequency with which certain song variations occurred and also to examine the relationship, if any, between these. It should be stated that I have not observed marked birds during this survey. Songs were counted as a fresh utterance when either, *i* a bird had changed its position and started to sing again from a new perch some distance away or *ii* had stopped singing its song for a period of time longer than the natural pauses of a song sequence e.g. when a bird had been singing the "sawing" song I have not counted the number of separate sawing phrases, but only from the fresh start of a sawing sequence irrespective of the phrases sung. Emphasis was noted by a heavier line, pitch by writing the symbols at different levels, cf. North M.E.W.

The term Phrase is used here to denote sawing and Component for the disyllabic and trisyllabic utterances of the second and third variations described cf. *The Handbook*, p. XVIII.

The Song Period. The total of all song types for the period surveyed is shown in Fig. 1. It can be seen that although some song was uttered in all months of the year, the main Song period occurred between the end of January and third week of May which agrees well with the song chart given in *The Handbook*.

Song Times. The times of singing of four hundred and eighty-one songs are shown in Fig. 2. Two song peaks occur, between 8 a.m. and 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. and 6 p.m. There is fairly general singing during the morning and afternoon.

Main Song types.

During this investigation I have tabulated three main song types,

- i.* The Sawing Song.
- ii.* A trisyllabic component with emphasis placed on the single note.
- iii.* A trisyllabic component with emphasis placed on the double notes.

i. "Saw-sharpening" is easily the type of song most frequently heard. During this investigation I have recorded five hundred and eighty-one examples of it, Fig. 3. It consists of two components,—the "TEE" note, emphasised, alternating with "CHU", Fig. 6a.

One bird watched at close range "sawing" opened the bill for the "TEE" and closed it for the "CHU" notes.

The tempo of this song is varied, it is also pitched variously and with wide differences in timbre (some songs are very harsh) considerable variation is achieved.

Sometimes the sawing phrases are of long duration, at other times much shorter while occasionally a phrase of sawing is interrupted by an extra note interpolated to give a jerky presentation. Another variant consists of detached notes Fig. 6b.

On 6th February 1956, I heard a rapid delivery of seemingly detached sawing notes Fig. 6c. and it was significant that at about fifty yards range the accented notes sounded like three disconnected notes.

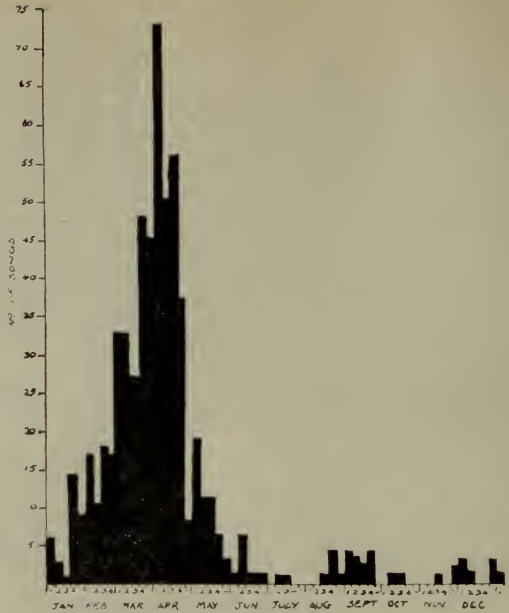


FIG. 3 THE SAVING SONG

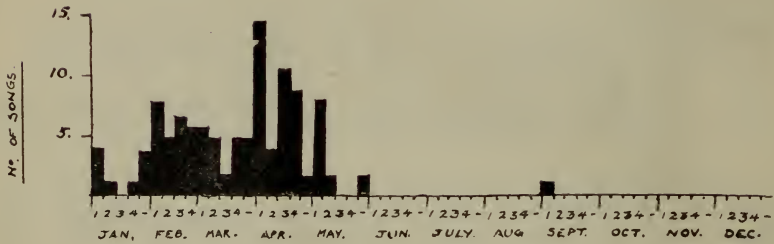


FIG. 4 11 / 11 / 11

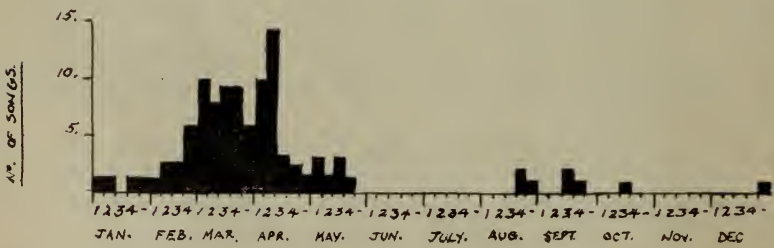


FIG. 5 11 / 11 / 11

Another interesting variation consists of a curiously yodelled "CHU" note Fig. 6d, alternatively emphasis is placed on the yodelled note, Fig. 6e.

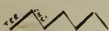
On 16th February 1956 an extension of this variation was heard, Fig. 6f. Also on this date I heard a variation difficult to indicate which I rendered as in Fig. 6g.—the wavering note synonymous with the "TEE" note.


These latter variations are an interesting link with the second song type.

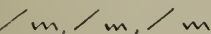
Usually this species sings from cover but occasionally it launches into flight across an open space singing as it does so.

ii. The second most frequently uttered variation—one hundred and eight recorded utterances Fig. 4—is a rhythmic trisyllabic with emphasis placed on the first note, the "TEE" of the sawing song, Fig. 6h.


This component is at times pitched differently and with varied tempo.

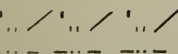
a 

b 

c 


d 

e 

f 

g 

h 

i 


j 

FIG. 6.

Once I observed one bird of a pair uttering this song in a flight of about fifty yards.

iii. The third variation—one hundred and five examples Fig. 5—is similar to *ii.* but the emphasis is reversed. Again as in *ii.* there is a variation in which the pitch of the disyllabic changes, Fig. 6i. The song tempo may also vary considerably, e.g. Fig. 6j.

A bird silhouetted against the sky and observed at close range kept the bill open all the time it sang while its throat was working continuously.

On a March evening at dusk I heard a Song Thrush *Turdus ericetorum*, which was singing strongly, deliberately utter eight and then seven equally spaced examples of this song. In view of the tendency of both species to mimic other songs it is possible that this bird was imitating a Great Tit *Parus major*. On the other hand it could easily be the reverse. However, considering the frequency with which this component occurs in both species' songs, I suggest that in this instance mimicking has not wantonly taken place.

It is interesting to note that I once heard this component from a distance of about one hundred yards when the "TEE" note was inaudible resulting in a rhythmic repetition of paired notes.

CONCLUSION

In this investigation I have attempted to tabulate song variations at the time of utterance by a simple diagrammatic form.

It is suggested that in the area under review there appeared to be three main song types with greater variation developed from a juxtaposition of the notes, together with change in pitch and tempo.

Some variation may result accidentally depending upon the distance from which a singing bird is heard, when weaker carrying notes become inaudible.

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A new subspecies of the Nubian Bustard

by CHARLES VAURIE

Received 24th October, 1960

The Nubian Bustard (*Neotis nuba*) inhabits the scrubby regions of the semi desert from the Red Sea Hills of the Sudan southwestward to the region between Abu Hamed on the north and Khartoum in the south, and then westward to Kordofan, Darfur (perhaps), Chad north to the Ennedi, and Niger Territory north to southern Air. It is not well known and relatively few specimens are in collections. The American Museum of Natural History has five specimens, three adult males and one adult female captured in Kordofan which died in the Giza Zoological Garden, and one adult male shot by Captain Angus Buchanan in Niger Territory at Taberghi, south of Agadès, ‘six or seven days north of Tanout’, on 4th July, 1922.

This last specimen suggests strongly that a different subspecies inhabits the western end of the range of the species for which I propose the name:

*Neotis nuba agaze*¹ Vaurie, new subspecies

Type: Taberghi, as above; A.M.N.H., catalogue no. 547514.

Description: Differs from nominate *nuba* Cretzschmar, 1826, type locality, Kurgos, near Shendi, Sudan, by being paler and less heavily and darkly vermiculated with brown on the back, rump, upper tail coverts, tail, and upper wing coverts, and also by being banded with blue-grey on the upper breast beneath the chestnut band, with a few feathers speckled slightly with pale brown, whereas this grey band is lacking in the specimens from Kordofan, the feathers in the latter beneath the chestnut band being barred or well speckled with darker brown. *Agaze* differs also very distinctly from nominate *nuba* by being smaller, by having a proportionately shorter tail, and much weaker feet.

Measurements: *Agaze*, adult male, wing length 418, tail 177, tarsus length 114, anterior-posterior thickness of the tarsus measured half way down its length 7.5, length of middle toe 45, length of the bill from the skull 63, length of the bill from the anterior border of the nostril 28. In the three males from Kordofan, these measurements are, respectively, 425, 440, 455; 252, 260, 278; 119, 120, 122; 11, 12.5, 13; 57, 59, 60; 73, 74, 75; and 36, 37, 40. In the female from Kordofan, 408, 219, 119, 12, 57, 65, 33.

The specimen from Taberghi is in the last stages of the moult. Its fourth

¹ The native name of this bird in the language of the Tuaregs.